

THE WILSON BULLETIN

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ORNITHOLOGY

Published by the Wilson Ornithological Society

VOL. 114, NO. 3

September 2002

PAGES 287–420

Wilson Bull., 114(3), 2002, pp. 287–288

NEST AND EGGS OF THE TEPUI ANTPITTA

(*MYRMOTHERA SIMPLEX*)

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ABSTRACT.—We describe for the first time the nest and eggs of the Tepui (Brown-breasted) Antpitta (*Myrmothera simplex*). Nest structure and eggs are very similar to those described for *M. simplex*'s extant sister species, the Thrush-like Antpitta (*M. campanisona*), and nests of this genus are similar to those described for other members of the ground antbirds (Formicariidae). *Received 23 October 2001, accepted 28 June 2002.*

On 24 March 2001, while conducting an avifaunal inventory of the north slope of Mount Roraima, Guyana (05° 17' N, 60° 45' W), we flushed and collected a female Tepui Antpitta (*Myrmothera simplex*; KUNHM 92366) from near the ground at 700 m elevation. Shortly after recovering her, we located a nest with two eggs a few meters away in a relatively flat section of an otherwise steeply sloped region of extensive undisturbed forest. Upon discovering the nest at 09:55 EST, BRB immediately began observations while MBR retrieved a camera. At 09:58, a presumed adult male antpitta flew to the rim of the nest and began incubation. Aside from occasionally moving his head from side to side, he remained motionless until 10:45 when he stood up and appeared to shift at least one of

the eggs with his beak. Incubation continued until 10:55 when he was flushed from the nest. The following day he was collected (testes 7 × 4 mm; USNM 622748) by C. Milensky. This represents the first time both sexes of *Myrmothera* have been observed incubating, but this behavior has been documented for other formicariid genera (Wiedenfeld 1982).

The solid, cup-shaped nest was about 0.6 m above the ground placed among the leaf bases and petioles of *Philodendron linnaei* Kunth (Araceae; Frontispiece). The nest was comprised primarily of small sticks with dead leaves at the base. The cup was lined with smaller sticks and rootlets. Nest dimensions were as follows: inside diameter ca 101 × 90 mm, inside depth 56 mm, height 145 mm. The eggs were oval with a light blue ground color (similar to, but paler than that of the American Robin, *Turdus migratorius*) with sepia colored spots primarily at the larger end. Dimensions of the two eggs were 26 × 20 mm and 27 × 20 mm (KUNHM 92366). The following data

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were recorded when the female was prepared: ovary mass 7×5 mm, oviduct 3 mm in diameter and convoluted, body mass 46.8 g, light fat.

The nest and eggs of *M. simplex* are very similar to those described for its closest living relative, *M. campanisona* (Tostain and Dujardin 1988). In fact, the nest and the color and dimensions of the eggs described for *campanisona* are so similar to those of *simplex* that we suspect that they would be very difficult to distinguish. However, the two species are separated elevationally where their geographic distributions overlap. On the north slope of Roraima we found *campanisona* no higher than 500 m, whereas *simplex* was not encountered below 700 m. In the absence of *simplex*, we have found *campanisona* ranging as high as 1,000 m in the Acari Mountains of southern Guyana, and in the Andes *campanisona* has been recorded as high as 1,200 m (Ridgely and Tudor 1994). *Myrmothera* nest structure and placement is most similar to the larger, more terrestrial formicariids in having a bulky platform nest constructed of dry coarse leaves, twigs, and/or petioles and located atop trunks or in palm or aroid leaves (Skutch 1969, Wiedenfeld 1982, Protomastro 2000). In contrast, nests of the smaller, more arboreal *Grallaricula* are constructed primarily of fresh, green moss and located in forks of small saplings and vines (Holley et al. 2001).

There appears to be a fair amount of variability in egg color among the ground antpitta assemblage. However, congeneric differences are slight; the following summary is from Schönwetter (1979), Wiedenfeld (1982), Whitney (1992), and Holley et al. (2001): *Hyalopezus* (light gray, pale olive buff, or yellowish brown), *Grallaria* and *Myrmothera* (greens and blues with dark blotches), *Grallaricula* (light coffee brown with dark blotches), and *Formicarius* and *Chamaeza* (white).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank D. Nicolson, D. Clarke, V. Funk, and T. Hollowell for plant identification. N. Holcroft provided English translations of the German literature. Our work was part of a long term assessment of the avifauna of Guyana by the bird divisions of the Univ. of Kansas Natural History Museum (KUMNH), the National Museum of Natural History (USNM; Smithsonian Institution), and the Univ. of Guyana under the auspices of the Biological Diversity of the Guianas Program. This is number 53 in the Smithsonian's Biological Diversity of the Guianas Program publication series. The Guyana Environmental Protection Agency kindly granted field work and collecting permits. Partial funding of BRB's participation was through the generosity of the Rudkin Award for Undergraduate Research at the Univ. of Kansas and the Burroughs Audubon Society. MBR's involvement was made possible through a grant from the Blake Fund of the Nuttall Ornithological Club and a National Geographic Society grant to him and M. Braun.

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